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BARREN
FIG-TREE.



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THE
BARREN FIG-TREE.

SPIRITUAL READING

FOR LENT.

*By Joseph
F. Schmitt*

1013 B

Translated from the German,

Adolph BY

Rev. A. GEYER.



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PREFACE.

A good parable is like to a good landscape, drawn by a skilful painter : every single object is made more agreeable to the mind by the just relation of all the parts to one another. For, as in painting, if several things were represented severally, in distinct pieces—in one a *hill*, in another a *wood*, in a third a *shepherd*, and in a fourth a *flock of sheep*, how flat and dull would these divided images appear, without any design or unity of story in them !

But place in one and the same landscape a hill, by its gentle rise displaying the beauty of its verdure ; on the side of which many spreading trees give a shelter and coolness to all beneath them : paint the shepherd as sitting under one of them, and looking out with a watchful eye after his charge of sheep, while they are feeding in a dispersed manner through the valley below, or on the slope of the hill ; and then from the *whole* picture there will arise something cheerful to the sight. Every single image will appear more lively, and in motion, and will bear its part in the general design.

The same thing happens in the case of parables.

To instance in this particularly, is the parable of the barren fig-tree. If our blessed Saviour had said in one place, *Bring forth good fruit* ; in another place, *Sinners, when called upon by their Divine Judge, will have nothing to offer in their excuse* ; and if He had added in a third place, *that all workers of iniquity shall be condemned*, all these three sayings of His would be true ; but they would not effect the minds of the readers so much in that, their plain dress, as they are apt to do now, when they are woven together into one short history, and come recommended to our attention by many pertinent and familiar circumstances. The turn of the whole parable, and the agreeableness of its several parts, one to the other, give a force and a spirit to the precepts included in it.

And, as the mind is thus happily affected with it, so does the memory retain it longer ; for the whole secret of what is called *artificial memory*, is only to make in the mind a sort of faint history ; just enough to tie together several loose and incoherent things, which being all brought under one set of images, are incorporated, as it were, and made to have so much union, that the remembrance of one naturally brings forth that of the others. Upon which account, it has always been found true, by experience, that there is no better method of instructing men in religious knowledge than to explain some of the choicest parables of the New Testament.

The book will do little good where it is hastily read

and put aside. Its voice is not one to be heard in the streets, or to join in the discussions of the day. It rather asks to be admitted to the confidence of those who will receive it, in the stillness of their most retired and private hours. It offers itself as a companion to the thoughtful in their seasons of meditation and their times of trial.

It would touch their religious sensibilities.

It would feed them with devout thoughts.

It would store their minds with images of Divine purity and love. It would, at least, suggest to them the topics of momentous interest, and gently lead them to the fountain of comfort, strength, and eternal life.

THE TRANSLATOR.

INTRODUCTION.

Although there is not a time, not a day, indeed, I might say, not an hour, in human existence, when man should not be working for his eternal salvation, yet the holy season of Lent, in particular, is a time during which the Christian must think quite especially of his sanctification, and the salvation of his immortal soul. "Behold," I would exclaim with St. Paul, respecting this holy season, "now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." (II. Cor. vi. 2.)

These are the days when, looking upon the Son of God who fasted for our sins, looking upon Christ crucified, who gave up His blood and life for the sake of our offences, we should fast, perform works of penance, die to our sins, and thereby make sure of our eternal salvation.

To this great and holy end our holy Church, who has the salvation of souls always in view, has ordered us to fast according to the will of Jesus Christ. She has chosen the period preceding the holy festival of Easter as a time for fasting, because, during this time, our Divine Redeemer suffered for our sins, and that we may do penance with Him for our own transgressions. During this time does the Church put on the color of mourning, to remind us to wail over our sins and errors, and sincerely to repent for them. During this time she orders doleful anthems to be sung

during the Divine service, instead of hymns of joy, to make us feel the grievousness and misery of our sins. Towards the end of Lent she demands of us to blot out our sins, by tears of contrition, and a perfect confession and penance, as Christ blotted them out on the cross by His blood. And finally, our holy Church demands of us, that when we have, in union with our Lord, done sufficient penance for our sins, and have risen with Him to a new life, we should intone a joyous Allelujah on the day of the Resurrection, after having gained victory over sin, as He did over death, and placed the salvation of our souls in safety, during the holy season of Lent.

Behold the object of fasting. And that the faithful should feel themselves more and more impelled to do their utmost to attain this object, it is the sacred duty of the priest continually to urge them thereto, and to keep before their souls the necessity of penance, and the return to God; in a word, the necessity of saving their souls.

Well, now! I will fulfil this sacred duty, by showing you that you are created for the purpose of making your souls happy everlastingly, by truly serving God, and not only during this holy season, but during the whole of your lives, by living virtuously, performing good works, and by completely dying to your sins. During this important season of the ecclesiastical year I shall endeavor to lay all these truths to your hearts, by explaining to you (in the order of its important contents) the parable of the barren fig-tree, as Jesus Christ relates it to us in the Gospel of St. Luke. (xiii. 6-9.)

The Parable.

“A certain man,” says our Divine Redeemer, “had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the dresser of the vineyard: Behold for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground? But he answering said to him: Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it, and dung it. And if happily it bear fruit: but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” (Luke xiii. 6-9.)

CHAPTER I.

Man is created by God and destined for an eternal happiness.

“ A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard.”—*Luke xiii. 6.*

Our own native reason tells us, without a doubt, that man, like the whole creation, must have been called into existence by a Supreme Being. For, were we to assume that all men are descended by natural generation from father and mother, we should still have to ask : Whence sprang our first parents, from whom all men have descended ? Did they, perchance, having no natural parents, come into existence spontaneously ? This could not possibly have been, for if all created things must have had an originator, a creator, and cannot have suddenly sprung into existence, how much more must this be the case with man, who has such unspeakably great advantages over all creatures, and which can only have been bestowed upon him by an Omnipotent Being, by a being endowed with the most supreme attributes and perfections ; and this highest and most Supreme Being we call God.

What we are told by the light of reason, is confirmed in the clearest words by the Holy Scriptures. “ In the beginning,” we find in the first book of Moses (i. 1),

“God created heaven and earth;” meaning not only the vault of heaven, but likewise everything in heaven; and not only the terrestrial globe, but everything upon it. “For in six days,” says the book of Exodus (xx. 11), “the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea and all that are in them;” this includes man, and speaking through the prophet Isaias, God says: “I made the earth, and created man upon it.” (lxv. 12.)

Behold, O man! God is thy creator, but if God is thy creator, He is also—and think well upon this—thy master. He can dispose of thee according to His pleasure. He can send thee joy or sorrow, happiness or unhappiness, good or evil, and thou canst not complain of Him. He can destine health or sickness, life or death for thee. He can say to death, either, Cut down the tree which I have planted, or, Let it stand yet a while, and thou mayest not murmur against Him. He can place thee in a fruitful soil, or among rocks and stones, or, in other words, He has it in His power to bestow upon thee either riches or poverty, affluence or want, and thou canst have no anger against Him.

God is thy Creator and Master; therefore thou, O man, art His servant. He can command thee to do what He pleases, and thou must obey Him. He can call out to thee: Do this and do not that, and thou must obey His will. He can demand of thee to make Him a sacrifice of all thou possessest, and thou must be ready for this sacrifice. Therefore, O man, consider that thou must always bow before the most holy will of thy God, whether it be pleasant to thyself or not, difficult or easy. God is thy Creator and Master; thou art His creature, His servant, who must at all times say, with St. Paul: “Domine, quid me vis

facere? ”—“ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? ”
(Acts ix. 6.)

God has created thee, O man ; He has planted thee upon this earth, as that “ certain man ” planted the fig-tree in his vineyard. What an advantage this is for thee ! Lo ! as the fig-tree is according to its nature and its fruit, one of the noblest trees, so thou, O man, art the noblest creature, after the angels, which proceeded from the hand of God. Thou art that noble creature, of which the Psalmist David says : “ Thou hast made him a little less than the angels.” (Ps. viii. 6.) Thou art that noble creature on whom God bestowed, as He did upon the angels, an immortal soul, destined to live forever with Him in His glory. Thou art that noble creature which He endowed with an all but angelical mind, with a reason such as angels possess. Thou art that noble creature on which, in some respects, He showered more graces than even upon the angels in heaven.

Say, oh man, thou noblest of all creatures on earth, canst thou lower thyself so deeply from that sublimity with which God has invested thee ? Art thou acting nobly and as a man should, when, by excesses and sensual enjoyments, thou lowerest thyself far beneath the unreasoning beast ? Art thou acting nobly when, wallowing in the mire of sin and vice, thou humorest all the lusts of the flesh, to a greater degree than even the brutes ? Art thou acting nobly when, like the lower animals, thou breakest into brutal passions against a fellow-creature, and couldst even tear him to pieces as one wild beast does another ? O man, noblest of all earthly creatures ! God planted thee into this world as a noble tree ; do not, therefore,

wallow in the mire of sin. Detest, therefore, the vices and passions of the flesh, do not live entirely for the sinful appetites of thy palate, do not follow the evil inclinations of thy corrupt heart. God made thee the noblest, the most sublime of His creatures, and all thy thoughts and wishes, all thy works and desires, should be the noblest and most sublime.

And say, O man, *where* has God planted thee? In His vineyard, in His church. Oh, what a prerogative for thee, O Christian. What a blessing for thee, that the Lord planted thee in His vineyard,—in His holy Catholic Church. He did not let thee be born in paganism, where thou wouldst not even have learnt to know God and His ever blessed Son, Jesus Christ, and wouldst have adored idols of stone and wood as thy god; in paganism, where thou couldst never have learnt the will of God, and couldst not have lived according to it, and wouldst probably have given thyself up to sins and vices, as the world and the devil desire thee to do at present. And finally, thou wouldst have perished eternally.

He did not let thee be born a *Jew*, when thou wouldst have scorned all belief in His only-begotten Son, and cast His graces from thee. He did not let thee be born in *heresy*, in that so-called church, which does, indeed, acknowledge Christ as the Saviour of mankind, but is steeped in error, has deserted the fountains of grace, has rejected true Divine worship, and has turned the overflowing springs of grace of the Church of Christ into dry and empty cisterns. No! He, the all-merciful, has planted thee a true fig-tree in His vineyard, into the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, founded by Himself. Here, in this Church alone, are to be obtained the true doctrine without

error, and all the holy sacraments, with their endless graces, founded by Jesus Christ. Here alone are to be found the one true sacrifice, with its infinite merits; the true priesthood, endowed with the authority of the Son of God, and the true forgiveness of sin through the representative of Christ; here alone we may hope to die a happy death, and obtain everlasting life. O Catholic Christian! Had thy Creator placed thee on a throne as an emperor, or a king, and given thee power over all parts of the globe; had He given thee, for thy own, all that thou canst see from the summit of a high mountain; had He made thee the heir to a Cræsus, the heir to the richest man in the world; then He would, indeed, have given thee a happy place in this world (though only *for* this world). But the Lord has done far greater things for thee, by receiving thee, while yet on this earth, into His kingdom, into His vineyard, into His Church, in which to obtain all the more surely His kingdom in the world to come.

Oh! thank thy Creator for this inestimable grace, for this great prerogative which he has bestowed upon thee, before so many millions of people, and promise Him to use, with all possible zeal, the graces of His holy Church, for the good of thy soul, and so attain the object for which He has created thee.

CHAPTER II.

Man is created by God, and destined for an eternal happiness.—
Continued.

“A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard.”—*Luke xiii.* 6.

“A certain man,” our Divine Saviour tells us, “had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard. Let us ask ourselves to what end did he plant this tree? Was it, perchance, only that it might fill an empty place, that it might grow, and then, when old enough, shrivel up and die, or perhaps be used for fuel? No, the possessor of this fig-tree had a different object in view: it was to bear fruit, and fruit both good and plentiful. Thus he had a *higher* end in view, which he meant to attain.

God, the possessor of the large vineyard of the earth, has planted thee into this world, and to what end? Perchance to let thee grow here, to let thee live either a long or a short time, to let thee enjoy the pleasures and lusts of life, and then let thee die and corrupt in the grave? No, O Christian! Thy Creator had, at thy creation, a higher and more sublime end in view. He created thee for another world, for Himself, for eternal salvation, not for the possession and enjoyment of this life,

and its perishable joys and goods. Whence does this truth follow in the most infallible manner? It follows,—

a) *From the doctrine and words of Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself, and of His apostles.* Has not Jesus Christ constantly taught, to His last breath, by word and deed, that we are neither to cherish nor respect the perishable joys and possessions of this world, because we are not created for them? In the Gospel of St. Matthew (vi. 20, 21) He says: “But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.” And further; did Jesus promise His disciples the riches, honors, and joys of this world? or did He not rather invite them to suffer ignominy with Him, and to carry the cross? Had we been created for this world and its joys, could Christ have said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”? Could He have said of those just men, who suffer everything patiently here below, and practise good works zealously, “Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven”? Could He have said this, if man had been created solely for a reward here below? Could St. Paul have written, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians: “For God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but unto the purchasing of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 9), if God had destined us for the short sweetness of this world, as it is called by a few happy ones of the earth? Therefore St. Augustine says most justly: “Oh, Christian! thy permanent home here on earth is the grave, thy true country is hereafter in heaven.” And in another place he says: “Thou hast created us, O Lord, for Thyself, and,

therefore, our heart is restless, until it findeth rest in Thee!" Accordingly we must not expect much happiness here on earth; but up in heaven's eternal home we shall be happy forever.

This truth is demonstrated more clearly than even by the words of the Holy Scriptures, by the fact that—

b) *The Son of God came down from heaven to explain to us the will of God and to redeem us on the cross.*

Say yourselves, would it have been necessary for the Son of God to come down from heaven into this world, had we only been created *for* this world?—Would it have been necessary for the Son of God to explain to us the will of God, to enable us, by fulfilling the same, to obtain everlasting salvation, if He, our Creator, had not destined us for heaven? And finally, would it have been necessary for the Son of God to suffer as unspeakably as He did for us, if we had not an immortal soul, which He wished to save by His death on the cross? His birth in the stable at Bethlehem says to us: Oh, man, thou art not created for this world, therefore *I* come into this world to save thee for *another* world. All His steps, all His doctrines and sermons, say to us: Oh, man, I am wandering from place to place, from town to town, to save souls, and lead them to eternal salvation. All His sufferings, His heavy cross, His dolorous journey to Calvary, the nails in His hands and feet, the spear in His side, every drop of blood that flowed from His wounds, all call out to us loudly: Oh, man! all I suffer, I suffer only for thee, that thou, who art created for eternal life, mayest not be lost forever.

Verily, had that same fig-tree been planted by its owner to no other end than that of growing for a

time, afterwards only to perish and decay, the gardener of the vineyard need not have given himself much trouble to keep alive and strengthen the tree. In the same way I say to you : Had God only created us for the miserable purpose of growing here for a time, and then to die and corrupt, truly this would not have necessitated all the sufferings and miseries to which the Son of God subjected Himself, during the thirty-three years which He spent in this vale of tears. And if the Son of God had, for that same purpose, shed but one drop of His blood, I maintain that it would have been shed in vain, nay, been shed even for a worthless object. He would have given the highest price which man is capable of valuing for a handful of dust and ashes. No, oh, man ; Christ calls to thee from the cross : Thou art immortal ; thou art created for a high and sublime end ; for this reason I pay such a high price, to save thee for this same sublime end ; to save thee for heaven and a never-ending happiness.

And how, oh, man, shall I make it clear to you, in what consists that future happiness, for which we are created ? What shall I tell you, to show how inexpressibly happy we shall be, when we have attained that happiness ?

It were vain, were I to attempt to describe the happiness of heaven, which awaits us ; so I must content myself with quoting those words on the subject uttered by the Holy Ghost and our Lord, by the mouths of the prophets and apostles : "How great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden from them that fear Thee," (Ps. xxx. 20), exclaims the Psalmist. And further, the Son of God Himself, when speaking of the glories of the blessed,

says : "Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their father." (Matt. xiii. 43.) Therefore He calls to the faithful, as if to let them feel by anticipation the reward for their virtues : "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. v. 12.) What encouraging and consoling words are these ! And finally, St. Paul, who had the grace, while still in this world, to have a glimpse of the glories of heaven, exclaims in ecstasy over this inexpressible happiness : "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for those that love Him." Yes, when we reflect upon this utterance of the Apostle's, then we can conceive why St. Bernard, while pondering over the joys of heaven, should break out into the joyous exclamation : "O joy of joys ! O joy that passeth all other joys ! Besides thee there is no joy !"

St. Catherine of Siena tells us how, one day when rapt in prayer, she was in spirit transported to the glories of heaven, where she beheld the secrets of God. Suddenly, awakening from her trance, she tried to speak, but sobs choked her voice. Three days and three nights she wept incessantly, and when surprise was expressed thereat, she said : "Do not wonder at this. Rather should ye wonder that my heart does not break every day, when I think on the glories I have beheld, and now again find myself in this vale of tears."

Dear Christian ! for that same glory of heaven thou art created by God. What an unspeakable happiness ! Added to this is the fact that that inexpressible bliss is, at the same time, eternal, never ending.

"Of His kingdom," says St. Luke, there shall be

no end." (i. 33.) And our Divine Saviour, when speaking to His disciples on eternal salvation, says: "Your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you." (John xvi. 22.) St. Augustine, full of longing for the eternal life, exclaims: "Oh, fountain of life! when shall I enter upon the joys of my Lord, whence no one will be excluded? Oh, the sweet, lovable life! Oh, blissful life without end! There is the utmost safety, secure rest, a restful joy, a joyful sweetness, a sweet eternity, eternal bliss!"

My brethren, time passes, the sorrows of life pass, but not so the everlasting glory, the reward for work well done. It knows no change, no end, but remains always, remains unto all eternity. Having such promises as these, let us not flinch, or grow weary in the great battle; let us not cast off the yoke of Christ.

When St. Symphorian was being led to his martyrdom, his pious mother followed him on the way thither to encourage him to bear his tortures without shrinking; and she kept incessantly repeating the words, "My child, my child, remember the eternal life!"

O ye Christians! I likewise call out to you: If you find it difficult to live a Christian life, to be converted to God, to bear good fruit for heaven, and to tread the steep path of virtue; if the sorrows usually found in a Christian life deter you, then look upon the eternal reward for which God has created you. Consider that for a trifling, short, momentary effort, you will receive a great, an eternal reward. Then make cheerfully this little effort which the practice of virtue involves, and in return you will receive an immense, an everlasting reward in the land of the living.

CHAPTER III.

Man must bring forth good and not evil fruit, if he would fulfil the end for which he was created.

“He came seeking fruit on it.”—*Luke xiii. 6.*

“To heaven I will go, to heaven I will go,” cried St. Aloysius, whenever he thought of the glory of heaven!

And truly, my brethren, we also break out into similar expressions when we think of the inexpressible and eternal joys for which God has created us, and are prepared for us in His heavenly kingdom, if we truly serve Him. For, can there be a greater bliss, a sweeter joy and blessedness, than that which St. Paul describes in the words: “Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for those that love Him”?

Perchance, there is many a soul who is sighing and wondering: Ah, shall my wish of reaching heaven ever be fulfilled? Shall I ever be thought worthy to share one day those heavenly joys? O Christian soul! I answer: One day the Lord will come to thee, as the owner of the vineyard came to the fig-tree, seeking fruits upon thee, namely the fruits of good works. If He does not find them, He will be filled with wrath,

and will call out to Death: "Cut the tree down, and cast into the fire." But if He finds good fruits in thy soul, oh! then be convinced that He will turn to thee full of love and say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world. (Matt. xxv. 34.)"

I said just now that if we would attain the object for which God has created us, we must bear good fruit during our life.

Let us prove this truth by the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

"The kingdom of heaven," says our Divine Redeemer, "is like unto a householder, who went out early in the morning, to hire laborers into his vineyard. And having agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the market-place idle. And he said to them: Go ye also into my vineyard, and I shall give you what shall be just. And they went their way. And again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did in a like manner. But about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing and said to them: Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say to him: Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them: Go ye also into my vineyard. And when evening was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith to the steward: *Call the laborers and pay them their hire.*" (Matt. xx.)

Tell me, my brethren, are we not meant in these laborers to see ourselves, whom God has placed in His vineyard in this world, to do good in His service; so that in the evening of our life He may reward us for what we have done? Or do you think the owner of that vineyard would have rewarded

those laborers, if they had done no work, had sat with folded hands and had given themselves up to idleness? Or, if they had gone against the will of their lord, and worked evil in his vineyard, if they had rooted up the vines instead of the weeds, and perpetrated every imaginable kind of mischief? Do you think he would have rewarded them? Even so, can you imagine that the Lord, our Creator, in whose service we ought to work and do good, can you imagine that He will reward us, in the evening of our life, if we shall have given way to sloth, and omitted to do the good He has commanded us to do? We receive already in this world a reward for a good deed, and even so, God gives eternal rewards for good works only. "Every man," says St. Paul, "shall receive his own reward according to his labor." He will receive a good reward, if he has done good, a heavenly reward, if he has done good works for heaven.

O Christian! Be, therefore, industrious in doing good. The evening of thy life will come, when the Lord will come to thee, like the owner of the vineyard, and look for fruit on the tree which He has planted in this world; and woe be to thee if He finds no good fruits, no deeds on thee; He will then call out to Death: "Cut down this tree and cast it into the fire."

A second proof of these truths our Divine Lord gives us in the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. When, in the middle of the night, a voice was heard crying: "The bride-groom cometh," the foolish ones had no oil in their lamps; and while they went to buy some, the bride-groom led the wise virgins into the bridal chamber, which was then locked

against the foolish ones. That bride-groom is God ; those ten virgins are the children of man ; the oil, which the wise virgins had in their lamps, are the good works of the just ; the bridal chamber is heaven. Now tell me, my brethren, whom will God one day lead into the heavenly bridal chamber, when the night of life comes, and with it the Bride-groom and Judge ? Only those who have oil for their lamps ; that is, those who have gathered a store of good works.

O Christian ! Persevere, then, in doing good. The night of death will come, in which the Bride-groom, thy Judge, will appear, and woe be to thee if He finds no oil in thy lamp of life. If He finds no good deeds in thee, He will close the door of the celestial chamber against thee, and call out to thee, as He did to the foolish virgins : “ I know thee not.”

As another proof of our assertion, we will cite a third of our Divine Lord’s parables : “ A man going into a far country, called his servants, and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability ; and he immediately took his departure. And he that had received the five talents, went his way and traded with the same, and gained other five. And in like manner, he that had received the two gained other two. But he that had received the one, going his way, digged into the earth, and hid his lord’s money. But after a long time, the lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them, and he that had received the five talents, coming, brought other five talents, saying : Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents, behold I have gained other five over and above. His lord said to him : Well done, good and faithful servant ; because thou

hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the two talents came and said: Lord, thou deliveredst two talents to me, behold I have gained other two. His lord said to him: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matt. xxv. 14-23.) This lord is God, and all of us are His servants; and the talents entrusted to us are the natural and supernatural gifts and graces, wherewith we are to do good, and obtain other graces and advantages for heaven. Now, my brethren, to which of his servants did the master, when he made his reckoning, say: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"? Did he say it to those who had done good work with their talents, or to him who had buried his talent and done nothing at all with it? In like manner will our Lord speak to us, if we have used well the talents entrusted to us. If we have failed to do this, He will, when He makes His reckoning with us, call out to His angels: "And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Therefore, I say, without good works, no salvation.

No less clearly have the apostles expressed themselves in all their teachings and writings, to the effect that without the fruit of good works we cannot obtain salvation. "I have placed ye in this world," says our Divine Lord, "that ye may bring forth fruit, and that your fruit may remain." Do these words not apply to every man? Did not God place every man in the world, that he might bear

fruit, which would remain for life everlasting? Therefore, the Apostle exhorts us to do good, when he writes : “ And in doing good let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing.” (Gal. vi. 9.) And again : “ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works.” (Eph. ii. 10.) Yes, we are created for good works, we must therefore do good unceasingly. We ought to perform good works at every period of our life, in youth, in manhood, and in old age. This is proven again in the parable of the fig-tree. “ Behold,” said the lord of the vineyard to his gardener, “ for three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none.

O Christian ! to thee also the Lord, who planted thee, comes at three different periods. He comes to thee, in thy youth, and seeks for the fruits of the young tree. He looks for the fruits of piety, of filial obedience, for the fruits of purity of heart, and chastity ; and blessed indeed is that youth or maiden on whose tree of life the Lord finds such fruits. He will register them in the book of life, until that hour shall come, when He can say to them : “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” He comes to thee in thy manhood and looks for good fruits on the now strong and well-grown tree. He comes to you, O ye fathers and mothers, and looks for the fruits of your children’s good education. He looks for the fruits of good example to those entrusted to your care ; for the fruits of a peaceful and harmonious life ; the fruits of conjugal love and fidelity ; and the fruits of true piety and fear of God in your houses. He looks for justice in your ways and dealings and for peaceable intercourse with your fellow creatures. And truly blessed are you

if the Lord finds such fruits on your trees of life. He will register them in the book of life, until the hour when He can say to you: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He comes to thee finally in thy old age, and looks for the fruits of that tree, half of whose branches are already dead, and whose juices are nearly dried up; for the fruits of that tree, which will soon be cut down by death. He looks to see whether the old man still uses his little remaining strength to fill up the measure of his good deeds; whether he takes pains to prepare himself for a happy death; whether he sighs over the mistakes of his past life, and endeavors to make good what he has done amiss; whether he repents of the sins he has committed against God's commandments during seventy or eighty years; and whether he prays again and again for the mercy of God, in the approaching awful judgment. And truly blessed is he of whom our Lord can say: "Not for three, but for seventy or eighty years, have I sought for fruit on this tree, and having found them in youth, still find them in old age." The Lord will register them in the book of life, until the now fast approaching hour of death shall come, and He can say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." O Christian! Heaven is only for *good* works; without them *no* salvation. I say more. Without good works not only no blessedness, but everlasting perdition. What says St. John of the tree which brought forth no good fruit? "It shall be cut down, and cast into the fire." What said our Divine Lord, when He one day saw a barren fig-tree by the road-side? He *cursed* it. And wherefore will the

Judge one day say to the damned on His left-hand side, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"? Because, as He says Himself, they did not feed Him when He was hungry, they gave Him no drink in His thirst; did not clothe Him when He was naked; and did not visit Him when He was sick or in prison. In other words, because they had practised no good works.

"Good works," says St. Bonaventure, "are the door to the heavenly Jerusalem." Therefore, I beg of you: Do good, that ye may enter through this door.

Bring forth good fruit, O ye children, ye youths and maidens; do so already in your childhood, and youth, that the Lord, if He comes to you thus early to look for fruit, He may find it on your trees of life. Bring forth good fruit, O ye in the prime of life, for though in full strength, perchance the day may not be far off when the Lord shall command death to cut down your trees of life. Bring forth good works for heaven, O ye aged men and women, as many as ye still can, with your feeble strength, for the hour of evening is at hand, when the Lord says to His steward: "Call the laborers and pay them their due."

CHAPTER IV.

Man must bring forth good, and not evil fruit, if he would fulfil the end for which he was created.—Continued.

“He came seeking fruit on it.”—*Luke xiii. 6.*

I say that he who brings forth bad fruit, or in other words, he who sins, cannot obtain heaven, because—

a) *Through sin he loses the love of God, and incurs the wrath of God.*

Now I ask: Can God love the sinner? Yes, God loves the sinner even after he has sinned, in so far as He does not wish his precious soul to be lost. Therefore, He continues to give him His graces, even after he has sinned, and does very much to reclaim him. On the other hand, He does not love him, in so far as sin, which is in His eyes a horror, weighs down his soul and makes it loathsome in the eyes of God. Therefore, we may say God hates the sinner, because He hates sin, and the sinner has committed sin. Moreover, God hates the sinner, because by sinning he revolts against Him, and through his sin has refused God the service and obedience due to Him. Through his sin he has said: “Non serviam,” “I will not serve thee.” Therefore the Holy Ghost speaks through His prophet: “But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.” (*Wisdom xiv. 9.*)

Now say, O sinner, dost thou think that God could receive thee among His blessed, when thou and thy impious ways are hateful to Him? Surely not. Only those can attain salvation on whom rests God's approbation and His love.

Therefore our Divine Lord also says: "If any one love me my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.) But the sinner is not he whom God loves, and God cannot love him or take up His abode with him, or abide with him in heaven. Sinner, look but on the fig-tree. The Lord was so angry with it, even for bringing forth no fruit, that He said, "Cut it down." How much more angry must He be with thee, when, not content with bringing forth no good fruit at all, thou givest offence by bringing forth *bad* fruit. Must He not be much more displeased and call out: "Down with the tree and cast it into the fire"? O, I beg of thee, leave off sinning, that thou mayest not forfeit God's love and thereby lose thy salvation. Leave off sinning and, during this holy season of Lent, begin to repent of thy sins, and bear the fruit of good works. Perhaps during this time the Lord will come and seek for fruit on the tree of thy life. and finding none, His terrible words may be fulfilled in thee: "Cut it down," for "the tree which bears no good, but only bad fruit, will be cut down and cast into the fire."

Further the sinner cannot obtain heaven, because—

b) *He cannot, while in a state of sin, gain any merits for heaven, and through sin destroys all past merits.* God created us by His grace, and wishes us also to be saved by grace; but though heaven is God's gracious gift, still He wishes us to deserve heaven by our co-operation, by fulfilling the will of God and by good works.

In other words, heaven is a reward which God intends to give us for our merits. Christ Himself calls it a reward, when speaking to the just who, by their pure and holy lives, have deserved heaven: "Be glad, therefore," He says, "and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. v. 12.) And again, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the lord of the vineyard says to his steward: "Call the laborers and pay them their hire." And St. Paul writes: "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." (Cor. iii. 8.) Now I ask thee: Canst thou, while in a state of mortal sin, bear good fruit for heaven, or obtain merits for which thou couldst receive heaven as a reward? I say *no*; for all the good done, while in a state of mortal sin, will not help thee to possess heaven. "As the branch," says our Divine Lord, "cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me." (John xv. 4.) Thou art that branch; Jesus Christ is the vine; and sin is the knife which has cut thee off and separated thee from God. Accordingly thou canst not bear fruit for heaven, so long as thou art not in connection with the true vine. "So long as man," says a pious writer, "remains in the state of mortal sin, he may be compared to those unhappy mothers who only give birth to dead children;" for such a man only bears dead fruit, which cannot live before God nor avail him for eternal life. "As the light of the moon," says St. Bernard, "depends only upon the sun, so the merit of our good works depends solely upon the state of grace of our soul." In the state of sin by which this state is destroyed, the obtaining of such merits for heaven is accordingly impossible.

Add to this: hadst thou, while in the state of grace,

gained the highest merits for heaven by thy good works ; by yielding to one mortal sin all thy merits are lost. Through His prophet, the Holy Ghost says : “ If the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity, all his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered.” (Ezech. xviii. 24.) St. Cyprian tells us that “ As a hail-storm to an orchard of ripe fruit, as a gale of wind to a fruit tree, as a pestilence among cattle, and as a furious hurricane to ships at sea, so is sin to man : total destruction of all good works.” Sin is a worm which gnaws away all that is good ; a fire that burns it ; a rottenness that corrupts it ; and a sword that annihilates it.

O awful curse of sin ! If a man were to fast rigidly, to lead an austere life, to pray incessantly, always be mortified, pure and chaste, and would so continue perhaps for twenty or thirty years ; if he then were to commit one mortal sin, he would lose all merit of his former virtues. Just as a merchant, who having amassed immense treasures, has happily escaped the dangers of the sea, and then suffers shipwreck, just as he approaches the harbor, and is in sight of his longed-for native country. How terrible is his loss ! But how much more terrible is the loss of the sinner, who through mortal sin loses the merit of all his former good works, and forfeits his eternal salvation ?

Nero, the Roman Emperor, once lost an enormous sum of money at play. Agrippina, his mother, not daring seriously to reprove him for it, had the whole sum, upwards of a million, distributed on different tables, and showed these to her son. When Nero was much surprised at the large sums, his mother said : “ My son, all this money thou hast gambled away ! ” But thou, O sinner, what hast thou gambled away ?

Thou hast lost all the treasures of thy good works at one fell swoop. Forfeited is all thou hast gained by thy crosses and sufferings, by poverty and persecution, prayer and alms-giving; lost are all the rosaries thou hast said, the masses thou hast heard, the confessions and communions thou hast made. Lost is,—well mayest thou start horror-stricken,—lost is heaven and thy eternal salvation, which thou hadst deserved by thy former good life. Oh! I conjure thee, by the happiness of thy immortal soul, leave off sinning from this hour. In this holy season of penance, repent of all thy sins, or thy salvation is lost forever!

O, believe me, my brethren, as the Lord comes to look, whether the tree, planted in his vineyard, bears *good* fruit, so also He seeks for the *bad* fruit; and both good and bad He registers in the eternal book of life. “During three years,” says the parable, “I come, seeking fruit on this tree.” At three different periods the Lord comes to thee, O sinner, and sees the bad fruit borne by thy soul. He comes in thy youth, and alas! how is the tree of thy life, already laden with evil deeds. There He finds the sins of disobedience and obstinacy, committed by boys and girls against their parents. There He finds perchance hundreds of evil deeds against holy purity and innocence, of which thou hast made thyself guilty by indecent words and songs, and voluntary impure thoughts and desires; by actions of concupiscence and lust. There He finds the grievous crimes with which the shameless youth has dyed his soul by the seduction of innocent souls, and the shameless girl by her bold and licentious conduct, and loose morals. There he finds many a youth a prodigal son, many a young woman a sinner like Magdalen. And what do you suppose the Lord

would say to a tree with such fruits of sin upon it? Ask yourselves, and will not the answer be: "Cut it down and cast it into the fire"? For "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire." (Matt. vii. 15.)

For the second time, the Lord comes to thee, O Christian, in thy manhood, and alas! what fruits does he find there? Perhaps He will still find on the full-grown tree the sinful fruits of youth; for thou hast as yet done no penance for those earlier sins; and perhaps increased them by sacrilegious confessions. Many fresh sins have been added to those of youth. Here, perhaps, the Lord finds injustice and fraud in business dealings, and imposture in trade; there He finds, very likely, discontent among married people, and quarrels and disputes, oaths and curses. Elsewhere He will see possibly longstanding and bitter enmities between brothers, sisters and relations; hatred and desire of revenge amongst friends and acquaintances. Again, perhaps, He finds parents bringing up their children in a way that points not to heaven, but to hell, and,—shall I say it?—infidelity and adultery amongst the married. And what can the Lord say, finding such fruits as these on the tree of one's life? Ask yourselves, and the answer will be: "Down with it and cast it into the fire;" for "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

And the Lord comes for the third time to thee, O Christian, in thy old age. Now is the tree half dead, and withered; its leaves are sere and yellow, and fall to the ground with the slightest wind. The old man's blood is cold in his veins; his strength is exhausted; his hair is silvered by age, and he drags himself painfully from place to place bending on a stick. And

still there are sins in his heart, the sins committed during eighty or ninety years. Still stolen property in his possession, and still he is not dead to the lusts of the flesh, and still given to drink; and ever yet impious and impenitent in the very face of death; and even now he has no fear of hell, though so near it. Lord, what wilt thou say to such a tree, when thou comest, at the end of its life, and findest no good, but only bad fruits? Woe be to such a tree! threefold woe! for "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

CHAPTER V.

What good fruit must man bring forth in order to fulfil the end for which he was created?

“I find no fruit.”—*Luke xiii.*

Not only does the all-seeing eye of God look down from heaven each day and hour on every one of us, to see if the tree He planted bears good fruit; but a day will come, when the lord of the vineyard will appear in person before his fig-tree, and search minutely if he can find good fruit. That day is the day of our death, on which God will require of us the strictest account of all our doings. What an awful day that will be, when the Lord shall say to His servant, Death, “cut that tree down.” How awful will it be, if we are not laden with good works, which alone may let us hope for a merciful judgment. What a terrible day will it be, if we see bad fruit on ourselves, which shall make us dread an awful verdict!

You know, dear brethren, from our previous meditation, that those bad fruits are our sins; the good fruits our good works. Now comes the question: What good works in particular ought we practise, and what special sins ought we shun, so as to attain salvation? I answer by limiting myself to the two greatest

virtues, in which are contained all others, and say : The Lord must find in us the fruits of 1) a faithful, and 2) a loving heart.

' "The Lord of the vineyard came seeking fruit on the fig-tree." In like manner God acts respecting us. He looks for fruits on the trees planted in His vineyard; and in order to make us blessed forever, He requires, first of all :

a) That we shall have preserved in our hearts *the faith* taught us by His Divine Son. Are we not told, even by our own reason, that faith is necessary to salvation? Why, we ask, did the Son of God preach His gospel to us? Surely, that we might accept the same. Would not our Saviour have taught His great truths in vain, to one who refused to accept the gospel? Would our dear Redeemer have preached in the synagogues of the land for such a worthless purpose, and would He have given His apostles the command to spread the gospel among all the nations of the earth, if it were open to man either to accept the gospel or not, as he liked? It is impossible to assume such an alternative. Jesus Christ made known to us the will of His heavenly Father, that we might be saved; and therefore the first condition of our salvation must be, that we should believe in Him and His word.

This our Lord says Himself in the clearest words : "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16), and St. Paul writes : "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him." (Hebr. xi. 6.) "Faith," says St. Clement of Alexandria, "is as necessary to a Christian, as the air he breathes is to him who lives;" and St. Augustine observes : "Without

faith no one can be counted among the children of God ; because without faith no man can obtain the grace of justification in this world, or eternal salvation in the next. He who does not walk in faith here below, will not attain the beatific vision." As most of the Israelites, when they had gone out of Egypt, did not reach the promised land, because of their want of faith, so also, if Christians have no faith, they will never reach the promised land of heaven.

Dear brethren, as without faith salvation is impossible, let us hold firmly to our holy faith, and let us not be led by any temptation into unbelief. When I speak of faith, I mean, of course, only the faith of the holy Catholic Church, which is the only true faith. To convince you of this, let me ask you, Who has announced to us those truths which the Catholic Church teaches? I say the Son of God, whom the angels heralded as such at His birth ; the Son of God, of whom the Heavenly Father said at His baptism and transfiguration : " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. iii. 19) ; the Son of God, who proved His divinity, when, at His mighty word, the blind saw, the lame walked, the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, lepers became clean, and even the dead returned to life. The Son of God, I say, at whose death the sun became darkened, the earth quaked, the veil of the temple was rent in two : all bearing witness that our Lord had been crucified ; the Son of God, who rose from the grave, as the Lord over life and death, and ascended into heaven, whence He had come. Is, then, the gospel, preached to us by this same Divine Son, truth or untruth? I ask further, Who announced to us those truths, which the Catholic Church teaches? I answer, the apostles of Jesus

Christ, who received them from His own lips; the apostles, who witnessed His saintly life, and divine miracles; the apostles, who, one and all, sacrificed their blood and life for the truth of the doctrines they had preached. And this doctrine, which they sealed with their blood, is it truth or untruth? Again I put the question, Who has announced to us these truths, which we are to accept? I answer, the holy Catholic Church, for whose head and *His* representative on earth Christ prayed, that His faith might not fail or that He should not fail in error. The holy Catholic Church the Son of God built upon a rock, that she might stand immovable in His doctrine; the holy Catholic Church to whom Christ promised His assistance in the words: "Lo, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world." Is, then, the doctrine, taught by this Church, truth or untruth? Oh! I beg of you, I conjure you, hold fast the faith of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His apostles; cling to the Catholic Church, for her "faith is the door to eternal life, and the foundation of our salvation." (Euseb. Emissen.)

Alas! when I contemplate these truths, I could cry out: How small, comparatively, will the number of those be who enter into life everlasting through this same door of the true Catholic faith! But I will not talk of this now, I will not speak of the many who stand outside this saving ark of God; but I must dwell on the unbelief which reigns outside, and alas! that I should have to say it, also inside the true Church of Christ. Wherever we look, in the highest and the lowest classes, in towns and villages all over the world, we see the most rampant atheism! We live in a time when, in the highest circles of society, a man

is allowed to boast of his unbelief, and say, with a sneer, that he has left the great truths of faith behind him in the nursery. We live in a time when this liberal atheism threatens not only to annoy, but makes great efforts to destroy altogether, if it were possible, the Church of God. We live in a time when the divinity of the Son of God is openly denied in books and pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals, and the Incarnation of the Son of God is placed in the region of myth and fable. We live in a time when a host of vain scientists value their own wisdom higher than the teachings of the holy Scriptures and the Church of God, and who must, accordingly, fall into error and untruth. We live in a time when even the uneducated men, who have barely passed through the classes of a primary school, dare to stand up in assemblies and public houses, quoting the hollow phrases which they had heard from the mouths of unbelievers. We pass through a time when many will hear nothing of the immortality of the soul nor of a judgment, with its reward or punishment, after death. And when, as a natural consequence, the aims and ends of men's lives are limited to earthly enjoyments, without a thought of obtaining salvation by the performance of good works. How great is the number of those who are practical unbelievers, and how vast must hell be to receive such an immense number of infidels! Thank God, we do not belong to those who must expect to be damned, because of their unbelief; for thus runs the irrevocable sentence of the Son of God: "He that doth not believe is already judged" (John iii. 18), and "He that believeth not shall be condemned." (Mark xvi. 16.)

Now you see, after His own words, the Son of God

must, when He comes to seek fruits on us, first of all find a faithful and loving heart, if He is to bestow on us salvation. But alas ! with the greater part of mankind, He must call out with the Lord of the vineyard : ‘ Non invenio fructum. ’ “ I find no fruit. ” I find no faith, and, therefore, the fruits of faith are also wanting. In vain He looks for true piety, for firm confidence in God, for ardent love of God. For the heart without faith does not think of God, it lives without God. The heart without faith does not pray to God; to such a one nature is everything and supplies all needs, and a blind fate orders everything that comes to pass. The heart without faith does not seek consolation in God when in trouble ; it is without trust in God, without hope of being saved by God ; because of not acknowledging a Ruler of the world. The heart without faith has no love to God ; because it accepts Him neither as its Creator nor its Benefactor, and still less as its Saviour. The heart without faith will not be converted to God, because it believes neither in sin as an offence of God, nor in His infinite mercy. Now, if an unbeliever is incapable of all these virtues and good works, must not the Lord, when He comes seeking fruit on such a tree, say with the master of the vineyard : “ I find no fruit ” ? And finding no fruit, will the Lord make such a faithless soul blessed ? Surely never. Hence the terrible words : “ He that believeth not, is already judged, ” and “ He that believeth not shall be condemned. ”

CHAPTER VI.

What good fruit must man bring forth, if he will fulfil the end for which he was created?—Continued,

“I find no fruit.”—*Luke xiii. 7.*

We have just heard that faith is necessary to salvation. But we are not to suppose that faith alone will save us. It must be combined with charity, and in charity bear fruit. This charity, or *love*, God must find in us, when He comes to look for fruit; and it is the most agreeable fruit we can bear to Him. Listen to the proofs of this truth. When a scribe once asked our Lord, which was the first and greatest commandment, He answered: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Mark xii. 30, 31.) St. Paul says that faith without charity will avail us nothing: “If I should have faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, I am nothing.” (I. Cor. xiii. 2, 3.)

That same Apostle places the virtue of charity even higher than faith, and over all other virtues, when he writes: "And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greater of these is charity." (I. Cor. xiii. 13.) Rightly, therefore, says St. Peter Canisius: "Great and beautiful is faith, but greater is charity; great and beautiful is hope, but lovelier is charity." Therefore, I say, God must find charity in our hearts, when He comes seeking fruit, when He comes to try and to judge us, and to prove whether He shall give us heaven or not.

Charity is two-fold: the love we bear to God, and the love we bear to our neighbor. We will speak first of—

a) The love we bear to God.

You have just heard the words of Jesus Christ, when He says: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart: this is the first and greatest commandment."

But why, we ask, must we love God? We are to love God, because He is the most bountiful and amiable Good. God, this greatest Good, is so immeasurably holy that we, even the angels themselves, cannot conceive Him. God, this greatest Good, is so immeasurably good, that in comparison with Him, there is nothing good. Therefore the Son of God Himself says: "None is good save one, that is God." (Luke xviii. 19.) Many a man is good, no doubt, and the angels and saints of heaven are most certainly good; but God is good in such perfect measure, that Christ says, that in comparison with Him, the holiest man, nay, the holiest angel, cannot be called good. Just for this reason we are to love this greatest Good with our highest love. Hence the word of Christ: "Thou shalt love

God with thy *whole* heart, and with thy *whole* soul, and with thy *whole* mind, and with thy *whole* strength." No love in the world ought to separate us from, or surpass this love; as St. Paul says: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?" (Rom. viii. 35.)

We must love God, *because He loved us first*. Confess it, O Christian; is it not true, that God has loved thee, unspeakably, and has, in His love, bestowed endless benefits upon thee? Thou must say to thyself: When I had no being, God created me; when I was created, He preserved me; when I was poor, He supplied my wants; when I was hungry and thirsty, He gave me food and drink; when I was naked, He clothed me; when I was ignorant, He instructed me; when I fell into evil ways, He showed me the right path; when I stood still, He kept me from falling; when I went on, He guided me; when I sinned, He forgave me; when I was lost, He saved and redeemed me. "For God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting." (John iii. 16.) And as God has loved us with such a surpassing love, we will exclaim, with the disciple of love, St. John: "Nos ergo diligamus Deum, quoniam Deus prior dilexit nos!" "Let us, therefore, love God, because God first hath loved us." (I. John iv. 19.)

But alas! where is our love of God? He who loves will bear any burden laid upon him by his loved one; where is our patience, where our willingness, to bear whatever God sends us? He who loves, does all he can to give his loved one pleasure; where are the good works we do from love of God, and to please Him?

He who loves avoids everything that could possibly offend his beloved one ; where is our anxiety to avoid all sin, whereby we offend God ? Or is it love for God, when we rebel against His commands, and do just the contrary of what he wishes us to do ? Is it love of God when we incense Him by our revolt against His commandments But does not the sinner say, in deeds, if not in words : O God ! I will not serve thee, I will not fulfil Thy law ? Does not the unmerciful man say : Lord, I know that Thou wished us to be merciful, but nevertheless I will not practise this virtue ? Says not the unjust man, by his injustice : Lord, I know Thy command, I know that Thou hast said, "Thou shalt not steal," and not cheat thy neighbor, but I mean to do the opposite of what Thou wishest ? Says not the profligate : Lord, I know Thou lovest chastity and purity and innocence of heart, but I shall love and practise the lusts of the flesh ? Says not the passionate man : Lord, I know Thy word, "Blessed are the meek," but I shall not follow Thy precept ? Is this love to God, our Supreme Lord, or is it not rather revolt and rebellion against Him ? Our Divine Saviour says : "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." (John xiv. 21.) And hence it follows that the sinner, who rebels against God's commandments, does not love Him. But how will it be, when the Lord shall come, seeking for the fruits of love, on the tree He has planted ? Will He be satisfied with the fruits borne by the sinner ? Oh ! I fear the words of Holy Writ will be fulfilled in him : "He that loveth not, abideth in death." (I. John iii. 14.) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," thus runs the command of Jesus Christ. To this He adds another one :

b) “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*”

How emphatically does God impress upon us the love of our neighbor! “*Thou shalt,*” He says, “*thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” (Matt. xxii. 39.) He does not leave the love for our neighbor to our own will and pleasure, no; He commands it in the strictest words: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor.*” And that we may accept this commandment in all its severity, He says on another occasion: “This is my commandment that ye love one another.” (John xv. 12.) He goes still further to compel us to practise this virtue, and says to His apostles: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” (John xiii. 35), or in other words, all those who wish to be my disciples, my Christians, shall know that if they have no love for their neighbor, I do not accept them as my disciples, and do not consider them worthy to bear the name of Christian. Finally, our Divine Saviour *prays* for this virtue for His apostles and all Christians, as if He wanted to show us that it ought to be the true property and special attribute and virtue of the Christian. He prays for it to His Divine Father in the words: “Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we also are.”—“And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me. That they all may be one, as Thou Father in Me, and I in Thee: that they also may be one in us.” (John xvii. 11-21.) Does this prayer of Jesus Christ not tell us, that before all other virtues, He desires from us the love for our neighbor? The Son of God desires of us the virtue of humility, but He did not pray for this virtue for us; He desires of us the vir-

tue of charity and benevolence, but He did not pray for this virtue for us ; He desires of us the virtue of chastity and purity of heart, but He did not pray for this virtue for us. But He did pray that we might possess the virtue of love of our neighbor, because it resembles the first and greatest virtue, the love of God, and because it is the most necessary fruit we must bear to attain eternal life. "The love of God and our neighbor," says St. Augustine, "are two necessary virtues of the Christian. You must," he continues, "have two feet to walk with ; and to walk to heaven and into the presence of God, you also require two feet. And which are these ? The two feet of Christian love for *God* and for our *neighbor* ; if you lack one of these feet, you will not reach the goal of your wanderings."

But our Divine Saviour does not only command us to love our neighbor, but also *to love our enemy*. To love our enemies is an especial commandment of Jesus Christ, and this love is an especial fruit which must grow on the Christian. Formerly the law was "an eye for an eye," which means hatred for hatred, revenge for revenge ; but with the gospel of Jesus Christ begins the code of love also for our enemies. Christ tells us : "You have heard that it hath been said : Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say to you : Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you : that you may be the children of your Father who is heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust." (Matt. v. 43-45.) Accordingly, the true command of Jesus Christ is to have love for our enemies in our hearts, and to practise

it by our deeds, and this is preached by St. Paul, when he writes : "But if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat ; if he thirst, give him to drink." (Rom. xii. 20.) Love of our neighbor, in thought and deed, is essentially the command of Jesus Christ, which we must obey, as St. Bernard tells us, when he writes : "If a man hates thee in his heart, love thou him with all thy heart ; if a man has injured thee by his mouth, (by gossip and slander) open thou thy mouth to say pious prayers for him ; if a man has injured thee by his evil deeds, bestow on him, in return, benefits and works of love."

Oh ! what a beautiful, glorious command is this, of loving our enemies ! Can there be a more beautiful commandment than this ? Did it not originate in the innermost heart of God ? Did it not flow from the heart of Jesus on the cross ? Oh, beautiful and glorious commandment ! Oh, thou blessed tree on which grows the most sweet and precious fruit, which is enjoyed in heaven ! He who succeeds in perfectly loving his enemies, can hardly rise higher in the path of virtue !

But where is this precious tree to be found, on which grows this blessed fruit ? Lord, if on the trees Thou hast planted into this world thou lookest for the fruit of love for our neighbor, then Thou wilt find but little fruit ; but if thou thinkest to find love for our enemy upon them, then Thou wilt have to say after a long search : "I find no fruit." Where is charity ? Where is the true love for our neighbor ? Is it found unclouded between husband and wife, who are united by the closest and tenderest ties ? No. Is it always found among brothers and sisters, and relations united by the closest bonds of blood ? No. Is it found among

neighbors and acquaintances who live in the same parish? No. Alas, for the bickerings between some husbands and wives! Alas, for the quarrels among some brothers and sisters, and relations! Alas, for the dissensions in congregations! Is it not in vain that our Lord said the lovely words: "Peace be with you"? Did not Christ pray also for us "that we might all be one"? Did, then, Christ give the commandment in vain: "The commandment I give ye is that ye love one another"? And do you think the Lord will be satisfied, when He comes seeking for fruit on the trees He has planted, if He finds nothing but hatred, envy, jealousy, falsehood, deceit, treason, treachery, malice, pugnacity, fights and quarrels, slander and backbiting? Will these fruits take us to heaven or to hell? Charity is the first and greatest command of God, of which our Saviour says, "Keep it and ye shall live." Hatred is the first and greatest commandment of the devil. Practise it, says the fiend, and thou shalt live forever in hell.

Where is love, I ask again, and especially the love for our enemies? Lord, even they who aggravate one another's quarrels, and keep up their enmities for years, and refuse to be reconciled, even these are Thy children, whom Thou hast planted in this world; but if Thou seekest upon them for the fruits of charity, oh, then, Thou mayest search whole congregations, whole provinces, whole kingdoms, yea, whole continents, without finding ten souls who truly love their enemies according to Thy word, who do good to those who hate them, and who follow Thy example, in saying, under the troubles prepared for them by their enemies: "Father, forgive them." No, their prayer is rather, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Their hearts contain only hatred, instead of love; their hands are ready for blows, but not for blessings; their tongues understand only to curse their enemies, but not to pray for them.

Woe be to us, woe be to us, if the Lord comes, and finds *such* fruits upon us!

CHAPTER VII.

God deals according to His justice with man, if he brings forth evil instead of good fruit. But He exercises long-suffering towards him, yet this long-suffering of God has a limit.

“ Lord, let it alone this year also.”—*Luke xiii. 8.*

We are told, by our Divine Saviour, how the lord of the vineyard came to look for fruit on the fig-tree he had planted. The tree had been growing there for many years, and had at last reached the age when it ought to have borne fruit, and its possessor looked forward to this fruit with great expectation. He came the first year and found nothing; and when he came the second year and still found no fruit, he took even the trouble to come again the third year. But when he again found only the barren tree, his anger and impatience were aroused and he called out to the gardener: “ Cut it down; wherefore cumbereth it the earth?” But yet, although his impatience had risen to the highest pitch, still he allowed himself to be softened by the prayers of the gardener, and left the tree standing, in the hope that it would bear fruit the following year.

Such a tree is the slothful and lukewarm Catholic who bears no good fruit. The lord is God, who in His

wrath ought to let justice prevail, but who, in His long-suffering kindness, still waits to give the tree a chance of bearing good fruit.

How many times has God told us, by the prophets of the Old Testament, as also by His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and His apostles, that He does not wish for the eternal destruction of man, not for the eternal damnation of the sinner, but for his conversion and salvation. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezech. xxxiii. 11.) That this wish may be fulfilled in the sinner, God waits with such great, such indescribable forbearance for his improvement and conversion ; He waits before punishing him ; He waits in the hope that he may bring forth good fruit, and so deserve a reward instead of a punishment.

Let us first take the proofs for this truth from the Holy Scriptures : St. Peter writes in his second letter : "The Lord dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance." (iii. 9.) And in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans we find : "God endures with much patience vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." (Rom. ix. 22.) These vessels of wrath are evidently sinners, who bringing forth bad instead of good fruits, have doomed themselves to destruction, and although they have been entered, or rather have entered themselves in the book of damnation by their impiety, God bears with them with endless patience, always hoping for their return and conversion, that He may be enabled to enter their names in the register of the blessed. If He acted according to His justice, He would have to punish them after every sin, but He bears with them with great patience and lets His long-suffering and

mercy prevail over His justice. St. Peter Damianus says : “ God sees the sins of the sinner and is silent. He sees them and does not make them known. He sees them, and for a time neither condemns nor punishes the sinner.” And St. Bernard writes : “ The great forbearance of God consists in waiting so long for man when he has sinned ; He waits for man for ten and twenty years, and even to the highest age.”

Oh, we must exclaim, how long-suffering is our dear Lord with us sinners ! In the Holy Scriptures it is said : “ And God, seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times ; it repented Him that he had made man upon the earth. He said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.” The destruction of man was then decided upon, but did God at once carry out His resolution, as the vicious world had deserved ? Oh, the forbearance of God ! He waited, hesitated to fulfil His threat, although man did not hesitate in vice. And how long did God give them for their conversion ? Not ten, nor twenty, but more than a hundred years. First He announced to them their destruction ; first He had them exhorted through many years to change their vicious habits, so as to enable Him to change their threatened punishment. Noe himself, the just man, had to preach penance to them, to try and move them to be converted. But then, when all these threats and exhortations availed nothing, then surely God was avenged upon them ? Ah, no ! The forbearance of God had still no end. “ Make for thyself an ark,” said God to Noe, “ that these blinded ones may see that my threats are in earnest, that they may see how thou shalt be saved,

because thou hast practised justice, and that they may perish because of their sins." Now surely the time of punishment was near. A few months and the ark would be finished, and the deluge, that terrible judgment of God, would commence. No, no; the forbearance of God was still not at an end; for forty, nay, fifty years, Noe had to be building his ark, at the command of the long-suffering God, to leave to those unfortunate ones still a little time, in which to return from their evil ways. What is to be said of such forbearance, for which no period of time is too long, so that it gives the hardened sinner a chance of conversion? Truly the forbearance of God does more than the lord of the vineyard: instead of waiting for three years for the tree to bear fruit, God waits for forty, fifty, eighty years, nay, during the whole life of the sinner, in the hope of his conversion, before calling out: "Cut it down and cast it into the fire."

Allow me to adduce another example, to show you the indescribable forbearance of God with the sinner, namely, the impious town of Jerusalem. This city was, so to speak, the beloved city of our Lord, on which He showered down His benefits. It was there that the Lord had that temple built in which He wished to be worshipped; there were placed the tables of the law which contained His sacred will; there He sent His prophets at different times to preach repentance to the godless inhabitants; there He sent His only-begotten Son, who proved His Divinity by word and deed, and again exhorted them to penance. But what did these impious and blinded people—what did they, although threatened by the most terrible of God's punishments if they should persevere in their iniquity? They, who had before

murdered and stoned the prophets sent to them by God, laid their hands on His only-begotten Son, and nailed Him to the cross. Now, ought not the wrath of God against this city to have been all the greater and quicker, when His benefits towards it had been so immeasurable? But why did not God punish this godless town when its inhabitants stoned and murdered His prophets? Because He is so long-suffering. Why did God not inflict the severest punishment upon this people, when they refused to accept His only-begotten Son after he had given so many proofs of His Divinity? Because He is so long-suffering. Why did not God take His revenge on this city, when its inhabitants condemned His beloved Son to death and nailed Him to the cross? Because He is so long-suffering. How long did God, in His forbearance, defer the long-threatened punishment? For forty years—forty years, I say, God waited for their conversion, before the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: “For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee around, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation.” (Luke xix. 44.)

But why adduce examples which are so far away? By ourselves, I say, we can plainly recognize this forbearance of God. Many a one amongst us has lived for fifty, sixty, seventy or eighty years, and during this time our Lord came to us, not three times, but many, many times, and finding we bore no good fruit, exhorted us to repent and amend. He has exhorted us by His prophets, the priests, whenever they ex-

plained the word of God to us, and threatened us with eternal damnation if we persisted in our sins. Still more forcibly has He spoken to us during our holy missions, and threatened us with heavier punishments if we should relapse again into sin. Often and often has He spoken to us in the holy sacrament of penance and urged us to abjure our often-confessed vices. Sternly and severely has He reminded us, by the troubles, sorrows, and illnesses which He has sent upon us as punishments for breaking his commands, and more particularly still by deaths among our relations, friends and contemporaries, and especially by the sudden death of so many to whom He accorded no more time to prepare for eternity.

And have we mended our ways? Have we completely abjured sin, and more especially that vice which runs through our life like a long chain? Has the Lord found continual good fruit on us, continual improvement? Have we not returned to our former sins after every good resolution, after every confession, and even after the general confession made during the mission? And has the Lord been avenged upon us after these repeated infidelities towards Him?

No, the Lord, patient and long-suffering, has waited. For twenty or thirty years He waited before punishing yonder profligate, who began his sins in youth, and continued them up to his old age; for twenty or thirty years He waited, before punishing yonder thief, who, in spite of his confession during the mission, has not returned his stolen goods even up to the present day; for twenty or thirty years he waited before punishing yonder drunkard, whose vice gets worse the older he gets; for twenty or thirty years he waited before punishing yonder hostile individual, who cannot exist

without disputes, and lawsuits, and the enmity and persecution of his neighbor. Oh, what a great forbearance does God show towards us sinners! If this long-suffering God had treated us according to His justice He might have said long ago, without doing us a wrong: "Cut down the tree, and cast it into the fire." Verily we find in ourselves a living example of the long-suffering and mercy of God, and with the prophet we must exclaim: "*Misericordia Dei, quia non sumus consumpti.*" "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed." (Lam. iii. 22.)

CHAPTER VIII.

God deals according to His justice with man, if he brings forth evil instead of good fruit ; but he exercises long-suffering towards him. Yet this long-suffering of God has a limit.—Continued.

“ Lord, let it alone this year also.”—*Luke xiii.* 8.

Our Divine Saviour, having once exhorted the obstinate and blinded Pharisees to believe and to mend their ways, and having vainly urged them to curb their rebellious spirit, He said to them the terrible words : “ And you shall die in your sin.” (*John viii.* 21.) Terrible words, indeed, “ You shall die in your sin.” I am much afraid that a like fate will befall that sinner who goes on sinning, presuming upon the mercy and forbearance of God, without ever beginning to bear good fruit ; I am much afraid that to him also will be said, “ You shall die in your sin.” The Holy Scriptures warn the sinner in the plainest manner, that the forbearance of God has certain limits, and one day comes to an end. Let us see what the Holy Ghost says by the prophets : “ Add not sin upon sin : and say not, The mercy of the Lord is great, He will have mercy on my sins. For mercy and wrath quickly come from Him, and His wrath looketh upon sinners. Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day

to day. For His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in time of vengeance He will destroy thee." (Eccl. v. 5.) What do the words mean, "For His wrath shall come on a sudden"? Can they mean anything but that God's forbearance with the sinner has ceased, and turned to anger? And what do the words signify, "In the time of vengeance He will destroy thee"? Do not they say to the sinner that the forbearance of God, which up to the present would still have saved him, can be turned into vengeance to destroy him utterly?

There are three different classes of sinners, who always console themselves with the forbearance of God, and continue their sinful life, and like the fig-tree, bear no good fruit.

The first of these say, as we find it in the Holy Scriptures: "I have sinned and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder." (Eccl. v. 4.) O sinner, if up to the present no evil has come upon thee, because of thy sins, may not the punishment of God overtake thee even to-day? Art thou to believe that, because thou hast sinned unpunished up to the present, thou wilt alway remain unpunished? A man had once made a lion so tame, that he allowed his master to place his head between his jaws. Many times had he done this, but when, one day, he repeated the dangerous trick before a lot of spectators, the lion fractured his skull, and the man died on the spot. Now see, O sinner, this man also could say, "I have often done this deed of daring, and no harm has befallen me," but did he not pay for his folly by his life? Art thou to believe that thou wilt be allowed to continue unpunished, in much worse deeds of daring, when thy poor soul is at stake? Alas! per-

chance the end might be the eternal death of thy soul in hell, if God's forbearance were suddenly to turn to anger, and He were to call out to Death: "Cut down that tree and cast it into the fire." St. Augustine says truly: "Let no man think himself safe and free, because God's wrath and punishments have not overtaken him, and let him not think he will escape the punishment of his sins, if God does not punish him at once; but let him rather realize that God is reserving His judgment, and that the wrath of God, however late, will suddenly and unexpectedly come upon him as the Scriptures tell us." Oh, do not say: "I have sinned, and what harm has befallen me, for the Most High is a patient rewarder." For I tell you He is also a certain requiter, from whose avenging hand no sinner shall escape.

Another man will say: "I have yet plenty of time to bear fruit for heaven; I am still young and full of life, it will suffice if I turn to God in the evening of my life, and do good." But tell me, did the lord of the vineyard only come and seek fruit on the fig tree when it was already old and half dead? Assuredly not, for he could not expect much fruit from such a withered tree; but he came seeking fruit when the tree stood there in all its vigor. Youths and maidens! you are also now in your full strength; therefore the Lord comes to you, seeking good fruit. Will you put off your Lord till your old age, when perhaps you will no longer be able to bring good fruit? How do you know that God will accord to you an old age? Was the rich man in the gospel a worn-out old man, of whom we read: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be demanded of thee"? And you, if you say, "I have still time to bear good fruit," may not God let

His forbearance cease towards thee even to-day, and say: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be demanded of thee"? Do you not remember that the three dead men whom Jesus recalled to life, had all died in the prime of their lives? And again, are not more men called before the judgment-seat of God, during the best years of life, than in old age? Therefore, remember the words of the Holy Scriptures: "Do not hesitate to be converted to the Lord, and put it not off from one day to another, for suddenly comes His wrath, and in the day of vengeance He will destroy thee." Suddenly the anger of God will also be inflamed against thee, and He will call out: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be demanded of thee." Wouldst thou, then, still be able to bear fruit for heaven, and return from thy sinful ways?

A third sinner says: "We find plenty of examples in the Holy Scriptures that God's forbearance lasts till death, and therefore I also can count on His forbearance, even if I sin for many years, and bear no good fruit to the end of my days; in the hour of my death I can repent." It is true, God allowed the thief on the cross to go on sinning till he was condemned to death, and in the last hour of his life, God had mercy on this grievous sinner. But, look also to the left side of the cross, and ask yourself, did God likewise accord mercy to this evil-doer in the last hour of his life? Did not the dying Saviour withhold His grace from him, in the very moment when His most sacred blood was flowing from the cross for the sins of the world? "Take it well to heart," says St. Augustine, "*one* thief our Lord saved, so that we may never despair, but the *other* one He allowed to perish, so that no man should presume upon His mercy."

“God only saved *one* thief,” says St. Bernard, “to show us how *rare* are such conversions at the last hour.” And again, we are told by St. Augustine: “During the five thousand years that the world has existed, I have only found *one* man, who, having misused the forbearance of God for so long, was yet saved in the hour of his death, and this *only* example is the thief on the cross.” How wicked is, therefore, this confidence in the forbearance of God, when thy immortal soul is at stake, and thou art to the last degree unworthy of this forbearance, from thy arrogance and presumption!

To keep you from falling into this mischievous over-confidence, I will bring another example before you, to prove that this forbearance of God with the hardened sinner is most uncertain in its duration. The king Manasses lived for fifty-five years in idolatry, blasphemed God incessantly, practised oppression, robbery, and murder, and was by these vices a great source of scandal to his people. At last God knocked at the door of his heart; Manasses was converted and did penance. Here we have an instance of one to whom was given the grace of conversion after a long life of vice. But on the other hand let us listen how it fared with his son Ammon, which will show what chance thou wilt have of finding mercy after a sinful life. Ammon used the language of all impenitent sinners, and said to himself: “My father committed many crimes in his youth and only did penance in his old age; so during my youthful days I will gratify every wish of my heart, and when I have satisfied all my appetites, I will be converted to the Lord and do penance.—And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasses had done.”

(II. Paralip. xxxiii.) Perhaps he also thought that God would have the same mercy and forbearance with him that He had with his father Manasses. But what a delusion, what a frightful delusion! Manasses had the grace to repent and mend his ways after fifty-five years of vice. But Amon? Did God let him sin as long, when really he was more excusable, with his father's seductive example before him? No. Amon was only allowed to sin for *two* years, and then God let him die a sudden death. Now, if you make the conversion of Manasses the foundation of your hopes, will you not also take warning at the fate of his hapless son Amon, and by his destruction be moved to repentance? He who sins, presuming upon the mercy of God, he does not deserve God's mercy; and he who, like Pharaoh, continues in his impenitence, will most surely perish in the depths of hell, as Pharaoh perished in the depths of the Red Sea. Therefore, O Christian, I conjure thee, by the salvation of thy immortal soul, remain no longer a barren tree, for whose fruits thy Lord, God in heaven, has waited so long in vain! Up till now He has borne with thee patiently; till now His forbearance has not turned to wrath and vengeance against thee; till now He has not called out to Death: "Cut the tree down, and cast it into the fire. To-day, perchance, He speaks to thy heart for the last time, and asks of thee the true fruits of penitence. "To-day, if ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Soon, it may be after this holy time of penance, He may cry out, full of wrath against the barren tree: "Cut it down and cast it into the fire."

CHAPTER IX.

Who are the special intercessors for the sinner, when the forbearance of God comes to an end? and what special means does God employ in order to save the sinner?

Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it, and dung it."—*Luke xiii. 8.*

For three successive years the lord of the vineyard came, seeking fruit on the fig-tree, and finding none, he at last called in wrath to the gardener: "Cut it down." Certainly the tree was to be cut down to no other purpose but to be cast into the fire, for it was fit for nothing else. The husbandman looked sadly at the tree; it had cost him so much labor, he had bestowed so much care, so many hours of his time upon it. Externally the tree was strong and flourishing. What a pity, he said to himself, for such a fine tree. "Lord," he cried, therefore, full of mercy: "Let it alone this year also, till I dig about it, and dung it," and perhaps it may yet bear fruit.

We have seen in our previous meditations that by this barren tree is meant that man who bears no good fruit for heaven, and therefore must finally be condemned by God to eternal damnation. Like the tree, that unhappy man also has his intercessors. As soon as God, after much forbearance, has resolved to punish him, in His just wrath, they intercede for him, and

generally not in vain, for mercy and a further respite. And like the lord of the vineyard, who allowed special means to be employed in the case of the barren tree, to make it fruitful, so God also allows extraordinary means to be employed with the sinner, that he may bring forth the fruits of penance and good works. Let us ask—Who are the intercessors between God and man?

Every sinner deserves God's eternal punishment after each mortal sin. The justice and holiness of God demand this, which have been outraged by the sinner through his mortal sin.

This truth is self-evident by the fall of the angels. No sooner had Lucifer and his followers rebelled against the Most High and broken their allegiance with Him, than at that very moment they were precipitated into hell.

This truth is proved to us by the punishment which instantaneously followed the sin of our first parents. Without delay God appeared in paradise, and announced their punishment to His disobedient creatures; unhesitatingly He expelled them from their state of bliss, and left them to the misery of an unhappy life, placing an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance of paradise, to prevent their returning to their former happy state. Does not every sinner, after his first mortal sin, instantly deserve the vengeance and punishment of God, just as much as the rebellious angels, and our first parents in paradise? Ought not the outraged justice of God make Him call out at once to the avenging angel: "Cut the tree down, and cast it into the fire"?

But, no sooner does God threaten the sinner with punishment, no sooner is the arm of justice raised to

cast him into hell, than up rise all those intercessors, for the unhappy man, full of pity, that his lovely precious soul should be lost forever; up rise those powerful intercessors which God, in His mercy, has placed by the side of every man, and beg for him like the gardener begged for the fig-tree: "Lord, let him alone this year also; he may happily bring forth fruit!" And such mediators, between the justice and the mercy of God, every man possesses, thanks be to God, several. Firstly,

a) *His guardian-angel.* The Holy Scripture says: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister to them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" (Hebr. i. 14.) The guardian-angels are to man what the husbandman is to the fig-tree; they take care of both soul and body. They are anxious that man should thrive in doing good; that he should bear fruit for life everlasting; that he should avoid all evil that could rob him of heaven. They are especially anxious for him, when he has long forfeited heaven, by a life of sin, and rejoice when he turns from his evil ways and does penance, as our dear Lord Himself tells us: "There shall be joy among the angels of God, upon one sinner doing penance," (Luke xv. 10), evidently, because by doing penance he saves his soul. Therefore, as soon as they see the sinner threatened with the punishment of God, they hasten to the throne of the Most High, and full of anxiety for the soul committed to their care, they beg for mercy, as St. Augustine tells us, (Soliloq. c. 7), in the words: "Lord, let the tree alone this year also, till I dig about it and dung it, happily it may yet bear fruit." I will speak to him and exhort him to penance, more than ever, and perchance he may yet be saved.

O, thou unhappy sinner, who hast up till now brought forth only bad fruits, perchance thou owest it to thy good angel-guardian, that thou still standest, a barren tree, in the vineyard of our Lord ; that God has still extended His forbearance, with which He has borne thy sinful life, and that He has not long since called out to His avenging angel: "Cut the tree down." Oh, I beg of thee, wait not longer with thy conversion, so that thy guardian-angel, whose intercession has till now saved thee through the mercy of God, may not have to exclaim in justice: "We would have cured Babylon but she is not healed." (Jer. li. 9.) "Just God, now mayest thou have the tree cut down."

The second mediator, who often obtains a respite for the sinner by her intercession, is —

b) The Blessed Virgin Mary.

"I am the mother of fair love," so speaks Mary in the words of the prophet. (Eccles. xxiv. 24.) "I am the mother of fair love." And truly that love is exceeding fair, when the Mother of our Lord loves even the sinner, and is a constant intercessor at His throne. As she, at Canaan, went up to her Divine Son, representing to Him the *temporal* need of those who were in trouble, that He might help them, so she stands now at the throne of her Divine Son, interceding in the *spiritual* need of the sinner, whenever she sees the sword of vengeance in His hand, and begs of Him: "O Divine Son! I carried Thee beneath my heart also for that sinner whom, in Thy justice, Thou now wishest to destroy. For him also I gave Thee birth, and suckled Thee at my breast; for him also I gave Thee up as a sacrifice; for him also I felt the pangs of a seven-edged dagger in my mother's heart; for him

also I suffered with Thee Thy unspeakable sufferings on Thy way to Calvary. Have mercy, then, for the sake of Thy mother, who has loved Thee so inexpressibly; have mercy yet for one year, only for a short time; perhaps he will return from his sinful ways and bear fruit." Will such a prayer of Mary's, I ask, be heard by her Divine Son? Without doubt; for is she not His Mother? His Mother, to whom the Son can refuse nothing, and least of all the salvation of an immortal soul. St. Chrysostom says to Mary: "*From all eternity, O Mary, wast thou chosen to be the Mother of God, in order that, by thy goodness and pity, thou mightest save those who, according to God's justice, could not be saved.*"

O miserable sinner! Thou who hitherto hast brought forth naught but bad fruit, perhaps it is for Mary's sake that thou, a worthless tree, has been left so long in the Lord's vineyard; that the long-suffering of God has still been extended, and the hand of the angel of wrath still withheld. Delay no longer, I implore of you, do not put off your conversion and your amendment. Mary has hitherto preserved you by her appeals to the mercy of God; do not force her to remember the justice of her Divine Son, and to say to Him, in the words of the Lord of the vineyard: "*Now mayest thou cut down the tree.*"

The third and most excellent mediator, who often obtains for the sinner a delay in the punishment of Heaven by His all-powerful intercession, is—

The Son of God Himself. "There is one Mediator," says St. Paul, "There is one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ" (I. Tim. ii. 5), and St. John says: "If any one has sinned we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (I. John ii. 1.) It was love for sin-laden men which drew down Jesus, the Son of

God, from heaven to earth; love, which made Him bear cruel agony for us sinners; love, which fastened Him to the Cross; love, which from the Cross caused Him to pray for the greatest sinners which the world had ever known; His murderers, crying out for their pardon in the words: "Father, forgive them!" This love still lives on in His sacred heart, and when He sees the righteous anger of Almighty God ready to root out the barren tree, to crush the godless soul, then does He stand forth as Mediator before His Father to plead for the sinner. "Behold, O my Father," He cries, "behold the Cross on which I suffered for this poor sinner; behold my wounds which bled for him; behold the precious Blood which flowed therefrom for him; remember the agony suffered for him; remember the anguish of death borne for him! Accept, O my Father, accept, I beseech Thee, all the agony of Thy Son, from the garden of Gethsamane until the moment when He gave up His soul into Thy fatherly hands; all that He suffered as a ransom for the sins of men, receive it all as a peace-offering for this poor sinner and have mercy on him yet for a time. '*One year more and may be he will bring forth fruit.*'"

O unhappy sinner! Thou who hitherto hast brought forth naught but bad fruit, to Thy Saviour, to Jesus, dost thou owe it, that thou art still permitted to remain a useless tree in the Lord's vineyard; that God, who has borne so long with thy sinful life, still consents to exercise His long-suffering; only for Jesus' sake is it that the Avenging Angel has still been withheld from carrying out the long-decreed sentence: "Cut down the tree and cast it into the fire!"

How great is the goodness and love of God towards us sinners, that He has given us such prevailing inter-

cessors that they have the power to stay the justice of Almighty God when He is about to punish, and to turn it into mercy. The tree which bore no fruit would, at the Lord's commands, instantly have been cast into the fire, had not the husbandman entreated that it might be spared ; even so might we all, perhaps, after so many and repeated sins, have already been called away from this world, and condemned to everlasting punishment, had not God Himself given us such powerful intercessors in our guardian angels, in Mary the Mother of His Son, and in His beloved Son Himself.

CHAPTER X.

Who are the special intercessors for the sinner, when the forbearance of God comes to an end? What special means does God employ in order to save the sinner?—Continued.

“ Lord, let it alone this year also, till I dig about it and dung it.”—*St. Luke viii. 8.*

When the lord of the vineyard, wroth at finding no fruit on the fig-tree, commanded that it should be cut down, the husbandman prayed that it might be spared for yet another year, promising, in order to move the lord to mercy, that during that time he would use every effort in his power to make the tree bring forth fruit: “ *I will make a trench around it and dung it,*” he said; “ *may be it will then bring forth fruit.*” What does the husbandman mean by these words? It means that he will use *special means* to make the tree bring forth fruit!

Thus does God deal with the sinner when he is already ripe for condemnation, yea, for hell. I am not speaking of the *redoubled* efforts made by his guardian angel to bring the sinner to repentance when he is on the point of being rejected by God, nor of the *special graces* obtained by Mary, when, for a time, she stays, by her prayers the just anger of Heaven; I do not allude to the joint supplications of the angels and saints

imploring mercy before the throne of God, in order that their joy at the conversion of a sinner may not be taken from them ; I am only speaking of the *special* graces which *God Himself* pours forth on a hardened sinner, that he may still have a chance of salvation.

Let me imagine a sinner who, until now, has lived on in his iniquity, never doing any real penance, nor bringing forth good fruit. I ask such a one, has not God often and in manifold ways spoken to thine inmost conscience and shown thee the number and the hideousness of thine offences ? Has He not, perhaps by the death of a relation, of a dear friend, or of some contemporary, warned thee that death would soon knock also at thy door, and root out the barren tree ? Has He not often reminded thee of the awful judgment of eternity, which none can stand without previous repentance and amendment ? Has He never let thee glance with the eyes of faith into that abyss of hell where everlasting torments await the sinner ? Has not the voice of the priest ever touched thy hardened heart ? Have the remonstrances of thy confessor never drawn from thee a sigh at the miserable state of thy poor soul ? Hast thou not, under these influences of special grace, again and again cried out to thyself, as the prodigal son : “ It is time, O my soul, that thou shouldst arise and go unto thy Father, and say to Him : ‘ *Father, I have sinned before Heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son* ’ ” ?

Thus, O sinner, has the Lord from time to time tried to work upon thy stubborn heart, and to lead thee into the path of true repentance ; He has dug a trench around thee, a barren tree, in order that thou mightest bear fruit. Woe unto thee, if thou hast will-

fully turned away from His repeated and earnest calls and hardened thy heart yet more against His voice ; woe unto thee if thou dost still remain obdurate, if thou bringest forth no good fruit ! It may be that but a short reprieve is now granted thee, and if thou *now* dost not bring forth good fruit, oh, then tremble, lest the time should be come when the husbandman shall say to the lord of the vineyard : “ *Now mayest thou cut down the tree and cast it into the fire.*”

Once more, is it not true that the all-merciful God has, as it were, from time to time, endeavored to take thine unhappy soul by storm ? Remember the many holy missions of bygone days. Because thou hadst sank so low that the Word of God which thou heardst on Sundays no longer touched thee, because the voice of thy accustomed confessor no longer convinced thee, therefore did the Lord send special messengers from afar, that not at long intervals, but for days successively, they might knock at the door of thy hardened heart and try to soften it. The enthusiasm excited in the souls of hundreds and thousands around thee ; their deep sighs, their burning tears of repentance moved thee also ; tears flowed from thine eyes ; sighs shook thy breast, and thou too didst obey the impulse of divine grace, hastening to the holy tribunal to confess all thy sins, all thy iniquities ; thou too didst participate in the unspeakable gift of God, —Holy Communion—(it may have been thine only good Communion in many a long year). Thou too didst abjure thy former evil life ; thou too didst hasten to thine enemy with whom for years thou hadst lived in bitter enmity, offering him the hand of reconciliation. Thou too didst make restitution of the ill-gotten wealth which thou hadst unlawfully appropriated to thyself, either in business

or by unjust dealing in lawsuits or otherwise ; thou too didst give up the habits of drunkenness and immorality, to which thou hadst been addicted from thy youth upwards ; thou too didst lift up thy eyes unto Heaven, making a sacred vow unto the Lord that henceforth thou wouldst “*Sin no more.*”

Behold what God has done for thee ! Like the husbandman, He dug a trench round the unfruitful tree, and—pass me the expression—he dunged it, giving it thus fresh nourishment, new vitality, inasmuch as He poured in the fulness of His grace, and this grace penetrated into the very roots of the heart. But has the tree since then brought forth good fruit ? A year, no ! only a few months had gone by ! the Lord came seeking fruit and, alas ! He—found—none ; He found the old tree covered only with worthless leaves ; He found the same bad life, the very sins ; the same bitter enmities. He found fresh unrighteousness, the same habits of drunkenness and licentiousness, the same careless, undisciplined life. Remember, therefore, O sinner, with what overflowing mercy God has inundated thy sinful soul ! Did He not try to win thy heart, to save thy soul even as by violence ? Wee unto thee, that from that very moment thou didst not once and forever forsake thy sinful ways ! May be thou hast now but a short reprieve. If now thou dost not bring forth fruits of penance, then, alas ! the hour may come when the husbandman will say : “*Now mayst thou cut down the tree,*” and cast it into the fire.

Truly all who, after such abundant graces from God, so many special helps, yet bring forth no fruits of penance, no good works, to *you* must be applied the words of our Divine Saviour, once spoken by Him to the Scribes and Pharisees : “*Ye fill up the measure of*

your fathers ; how shall ye escape the judgment of hell ?" (Matt. xxiii, 32, 33.) Alas ! my Christian brother, is not the measure of thy sins well-nigh filled to the brim ? The long-suffering and mercy of God are well-nigh exhausted, and soon—who knows *how* soon ?—the angel of Death, to whom God has given charge to cut down the unfruitful tree, will knock at thy door. Begin, therefore, to bring forth fruits of repentance, so that for thee the words of St. John the Baptist may not be fulfilled :

" The tree which bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire."

CHAPTER XI.

The dreadful fate of the sinner if he does not repent and bring forth good fruit.

“ Then after that thou shalt cut down the tree.”—*Luke xiii. 9.*

Great, marvellously great, was the patience and the long-suffering of the lord of the vineyard. With his own hand he had planted the fig-tree and placed it in a rich soil; he had appointed a husbandman to watch over it and tend it carefully, so that it might thrive and become a strong and healthy tree. Thrice had he come to visit it, seeking fruit on it, but in vain. And at last, when the tree was no longer worth the ground on which it stood, he had given orders that it should be cut down, but had acceded to the petition of the husbandman for one more respite, during which it might still bring forth fruit, and during this respite he had caused it to be dug round with special care, and even dunged. And after all this care did the tree bring forth fruit? No. The lord came for the last time and finding no fruit, he was wroth and commanded the tree to be cut down. O unhappy tree, I might well exclaim, how miserable is thy end! Long mightest thou still have adorned the vineyard of the lord with thy flowers and thy fruit: but now the axe

will be laid to thy roots, thy branches will be hewn off, thine end is the fire.

Behold, the image of the obstinate sinner! Great, marvellously great, is the mercy and long-suffering of God towards him. He has planted him in the fruitful soil of his Holy Church and placed him in the charge of the priests, His husbandmen. And when he would not bring forth good fruit, using special means for his amendment, He defers even the final summons to judgment and his final condemnation, at the intercession of his guardian-angel, of the Blessed Virgin, and that of His own Divine Son, thus tarrying to see if, haply, the sinner would not, after such particular graces, at length turn and bring forth fruits of penitence and good works. But no! No amendment, no conversion! Therefore, for the second and last time, does the Lord give the command to cut down the tree and cast it into the fire. Oh, miserable sinner! how wretched is thine end! Hadst thou but brought forth good fruit, thy death would have been a happy one, and thou wouldst have enjoyed the reward of thy works forever in the kingdom of heaven! But after a life of sin and iniquity, after a life barren of good fruit, there remaineth nothing for thee but—1) an unhappy death; 2) an awful doom; 3) an eternity of torment.

In Holy Scripture we are told that when Esau had sold his birth-right to his brother Jacob he went away and "*made light*" of what he had done; but when he saw that Jacob had obtained his father's blessing "*he cried with a great and bitter cry.*" This is a faithful picture of the sinner, both in his life and in his death. When a sinner has committed a sin he goes away and *makes light* of what he has done. When the unjust

and dishonest man has possessed himself of that which belongs to others, he *makes light* of what he has done. When the profligate has perpetrated his deed of darkness, when the shameless youth and the unchaste maiden have stripped from their souls the holy robe of innocence, they go away and *make light* of what they have done. When the perjurer, by false swearing, has obtained his unrighteous end, he glories in his success, he goes away and *makes light* of what he has done. When the oppressor recklessly harms his neighbor, when he has worked vengeance upon his enemy and brought him to ruin, he triumphs in his gratified revenge and *makes light* of what he has done. When the lukewarm and impenitent sinner, in order to save appearances, out of the multitude of his transgressions once in the year confesses this or that little sin, concealing his grievous crimes and mortal sins, thus sacrilegiously obtaining the absolution of the priest, he too goes away and *makes light* of what he has done. So the sinner lives on in his life of sin ; thirty, perhaps forty years, he does not feel the heavy burden upon his soul ; his unabsolved sins and trespasses do not weigh upon his conscience ; he has no thought for the fearful reckoning after death in eternity, for he *makes light* of what he has done. Then, suddenly the Lord appears, seeking fruit on the tree that He planted, and in His wrath He exclaims : “ *Cut down the tree : why should it still cumber the ground ?* ”

And death knocks at the sinner's door in the shape of a dangerous illness ; he lies stricken down on his bed of sickness ; terror and anguish seize upon him ; he feels that his last hour is drawing nigh, that his end is come. Oh, that it might go well with him at the last ! But alas ! he has sinned, he has done amiss, and he

has *made light* of what he has done. And now that by his sins he has lost the eternal blessing of his Father, he *cries out*, like Esau, *with a great cry*, for sin, his own sins, weigh like a fearful weight upon his conscience. Now all the wickedness of his life crowd into his tortured brain, and his crimes seem inscribed on the walls of his dying chamber; the manifold transgressions of his childhood and of his youth oppress his soul and drive him to despair. Now when his bodily eyes are about to close, his mental vision becomes more clear and he beholds his sins in their true enormity. Now when his heart is about to break in death it is still tortured by anguish and terror. Now when he can no longer commit acts of iniquity, his conscience reveals to him all the hidden malice of his own heart. Now that his tongue can no longer speak, a voice says to him: "Sinner! the Lord is at hand, demanding of thee the fruits which thou shouldst have brought forth in thy life!"

Oh, fearful words for the godless sinner—"the Lord is at hand!" and what answer shall his soul make to these awful words? "The Lord is at hand, whom I have served so badly during my life, whose commandments I have so often broken, whom I have again and again refused to obey; the Lord is at hand, whom I have so often offended during my sinful life, by grievous crimes and mortal sins; the Lord is at hand, He who gave me so many graces, which I have wasted and not used for my own amendment. The Lord is at hand seeking fruit on the tree of my life, and alas! *what* fruits have I, sinner that I am, brought forth? The fruits of sin by deceit and injustice; the fruits of sin by vice and sensuality; the fruits of sin by enmity, hatred, envy, and uncharity; the fruits of sin

by intemperance and drunkenness ; the fruits of sin by swearing, cursing, perjury, and blasphemy ; the fruits of sin by sacrilegious confessions and communions ; the fruits of sin —— O ! miserable man that I am ! —— for Hell for eternal condemnation ! Oh, terrible moment for the godless sinner ! Oh, fearful torture and anguish of mind ! Oh, hopeless despair of his terror-struck soul ! Truly the Psalmist is right when he exclaims : “ *Mors peccatorum pessima !* ” “ *The death of the sinner is very evil !* ” (Ps. xxxiii. 22.)

When the godless King Antiochus, after living for many years in vice and wickednesses, amongst which stands forth the notorious act of sacrilege, the robbery of the sacred vessels in the temple at Jerusalem, dedicated to the service of God, he was struck down by a mortal sickness and lay upon his death-bed. Then all the sin of his life came into his mind. In his anguish and terror he sent for his former friends and companions in his guilt, and in his despair he exclaimed : “ *Sleep is gone from my eyes and I am fallen away and my heart is cast down for anxiety ; and I said in my heart, Into how much tribulation am I come and into what floods of sorrow wherein now I am ! I that was pleasant and beloved in my power ! but now I remember the evils that I have done in Jerusalem, from whence also I took away all the spoils of gold and silver that were in it and I know, therefore, that for this cause these evils have found me. Behold I perish with great grief !* ” (I. Mac. vi. 10-13.)

Unhappy sinner, thou who hast only brought forth evil fruits in thy life, on thee also shall this anguish come at the hour of death, unless even now thou dost turn and bring forth fruits of repentance ; truly I say unto thee, this *great grief* shall come also upon thee and in despair and anguish thou wilt exclaim, as death draws

nigh : *“Alas ! into how much tribulation am I come ? into what floods of sorrow wherein now I am ! I perish with great grief !”* *Mors peccatorum pessima !* *“Dreadful is the death of the sinner !”* Yes, thy death, O sinner, will be an awful one, for on thy death-bed will the words of the Psalmist be fulfilled when he saith : *“Peccator videbit.”* *“The sinner shall see his misery,”* *et irascetur,* *“and shall be wrath ;”* *dentibus suis fremet et tabescet,* *“he shall gnash with his teeth and consume away.”* *Desiderium peccatorum perebit,* *“The hope of the sinner shall come to shame.”*

CHAPTER XII.

The dreadful fate of the sinner if he does not repent and bring forth good fruit.—Conclusion.

“Then after that thou shalt cut down the tree.”—*Luke xiii. 9.*

The Apostle St. Paul tells us that “*we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he has done, whether it be good or evil.*” (II. Cor. v. 10.) Listen to this, O sinner : “*We all.*” Thou, therefore, also “*must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ*” and to what end? To the end that every one who has done good may receive good, and he who has done evil—evil. What, therefore, I ask, what shalt thou receive, who on the tree of thy life hast nought but evil fruit? What wilt thou receive, when thou art placed on the left hand of thy Judge? What anguish, what despair will take possession of thy heart, knowing what the sentence of the Judge must be for thee? “*Everywhere,*” says the Prophet Amos, speaking of the last judgment, “*Everywhere there shall be wailing and in all places they shall cry, Alas ! alas !*” (Amos v. 16) And out of thy mouth also shall come forth this cry of despair : “*Woe is me ! woe is me ! alas ! alas !* Why?—Behold ! above thee stands the righteous Judge, whom thou hast of-

fended, *beside* thee thine accusers, and the witnesses of thy crimes." Thus says St. Augustine—

a) *Above thee the righteous Judge.* And who is thy Judge? It is Jesus, the Son of God, into whose hands His Father has committed all judgment! It is Jesus, whom thou, O sinner, hast again and again nailed to the cross as often as thou didst commit a mortal sin. It is Jesus, who each time that thou didst fall into the path of sin, ceased not to call out unto thee as once unto Saul: "O sinner! sinner! why dost thou persecute me?" It is Jesus, at whose blessed name the guards and soldiers on the Mount of Olives stopped and fell to the ground, Jesus, whose voice made the couraged Saul fall prostrate on the earth. Say, O sinner! What wilt thou do, when on that awful day of judgment Jesus, thy Judge, shall call out to thee, saying: "*I am Jesus, whom thou,*" by the whole of thy sinful life, "*hast persecuted.*" Where shalt thou flee when thou shalt behold the angry face of thy Judge? Wilt thou not exclaim with the Psalmist: "*O Lord, whither shall I fly from Thy presence*"? (Ps. cxxxiii. 6.) What terror shall seize upon thee when from the lips of thy Judge shall proceed the words which He once spoke by His holy Prophet: "*I will take vengeance on my enemies and requite those who hate me.*" (Numbers xxxii. 41.) At the sight of thy Judge wilt thou not, terror-struck, exclaim: "*O ye mountains, fall upon me, ye hills, cover me*"? (Luke xxiii. 30.)

And who is thy Judge? It is Jesus—Jesus, the *omniscient God*, who, when on earth, knew the sinful thoughts of men; He who foresaw the treachery of Judas, who foretold the denial of Peter. The omniscient Judge, before whose "*eyes all things are naked and open*" (Heb. 4. 13); the omniscient Judge,

“*whose eyes,*” saith the Prophet, “*are brighter than the sun, penetrating into the very depths of the hearts of men.*” (Sir. xxiii. 26.) The omniscient Judge, who knows all thy wicked thoughts, who remembers all thy sinful words, who discerns all thy unholy desires ; to whom all the wicked deeds, and had they been done in the deepest darkness of the night, in the uttermost ends of the world, yea, in the depths of the earth, are clear as in the noon-day. Canst thou, O sinner, deceive this omniscient Judge? Canst thou evade Him? Canst thou hide thyself, as in a cloak, from Him?

And who is thy Judge? It is Jesus—

The *just*, once the merciful, but now only the *just God*, who putteth on justice as a breast-plate and will take true judgment instead of a helmet. (Wisdom v. 19.) He is the just Judge, who dealeth forth such righteous judgment that He saith with the Psalmist: “*Ego justitias judicabo,*” “*I will myself judge justice.*” He is the just Judge, over whose judgment-seat is written: “*According to justice.*” He is no respecter of persons ; He judges according to justice. In His sight it is the same, whether thy head has borne a royal crown, or whether thy lot in life was among the lowest ; justice alone rules. In His sight it is the same, whether thou wast a rich man with millions at thy disposal, or whether thou didst beg thy bread from door to door ; justice alone rules. In His sight it is the same, whether thou wast held by the world in great honor, or whether thou wast looked down upon and despised ; justice alone rules. Think of it, O sinner ; He whom, by thy grievous sins, thou hast so often offended, He is thy Judge, who knoweth all thy sins and forgetteth none ; He is thy Judge, who punisheth all thy sins according to justice, leaving none unpunished.

Above thee is the angry Judge, and—

b) *At thy side thy accusers and their witnesses.* But what need is there of accusers? What need of witnesses? “*I find no fruit on the tree,*” thus saith the lord of the vineyard; I find no fruit, no good fruit in the soul, thus saith the omniscient Judge, “*Whose eyes are brighter far than the sun.*” (Sir. xxxiii. 8.) I find no good fruit, nothing but countless sins and vices. *And these sins, O Christian soul, will follow thee into eternity,* they will remain with thee at the last judgment; for, as the Psalmist David exclaims: “*Thou, O Lord, hast spread out our misdeeds before thy face.*” (Ps. lxxxix. 8.) “*In thine own heart dost thou carry a traitor,*” says St. Chrysostom, even thy own sins; and St. Bernard says: “*Thy sins will cry out to thee, saying: ‘We are thine, O sinner, we are thy work, we will not leave thee, but remain with thee forever.’*” Yes, they will cry out: “*O just Judge, show forth Thy justice and fulfil the words which Thou didst speak through Thy servant: ‘The tree which bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down, and cast into the fire.’*” (Matth. iii. 10.) What an awful moment for the sinner, when his own works accuse him and *witness* against him? Verily, in that hour shall the sinner lament and exclaim in his bitter anguish: “*O ye mountains, fall upon me, ye hills, cover me.*”

And there is yet another witness who is against thee: that holy being who during thy life-time defended and guarded thee, watching over thee, lest thy foot should knock against a stone, warning thee of sin and exhorting thee to bring forth good fruits for the kingdom of heaven, thy kind, thy best friend.

Thy guardian-angel: he, alas! is now thy foe, thy accuser before thy Judge. “*All the holy guardian-*

angels," says Origen, "will be present at the judgment, and each one will bring up before the Judge the soul he has watched over in life, bearing witness how many years he has endeavored to urge the sinner to good and how his exhortations had been despised." Yea, not only will he bear witness against the sinner, but he will also invoke upon him the justice of God and say: I have tried, O Lord, to urge this soul to good and to preserve it from sin: *I have tried to heal Babylon but she would not be healed.* (Jerem.) Therefore, O just Judge, show forth Thy justice! What an awful moment for the sinner when his guardian-angel shall appear at the judgment as the angel of wrath. Verily in that hour shall the sinner wail and lament: "O ye mountains," will he cry out, "fall upon me, ye hills, cover me!"

St. Basil tells us that there is yet another who will be present: "The devil, who tempted us to sin, will be our accuser at the judgment-seat." And St. Cyprian observes: *He will say: Never, O just Judge, did I suffer for this soul now before thee as thou didst suffer; I never endured stripes, nor bore the cross, nor shed my blood for him; neither did I ever promise him the kingdom of heaven. Yet me hath he served with all diligence and zeal, and brought me the costly offerings of his sins. Show forth, therefore, Thy justice, O just Judge, and say that this soul is mine through her own guilt, because she would not be Thine through Thy grace.*" What a fearful moment for the sinner. Truly, the hour is now come, in which he will cry and lament, saying: "O ye mountains, fall upon me, ye hills, cover me!"

But, alas, neither mountains nor hills can protect the unhappy sinner from the vengeance of the righteous Judge. The evil fruits which he has borne,

the sins by which he has offended God, these require their chastisement and the justice of God's satisfaction. Hence the Judge at length pronounces the awful words: "*Away, thou cursed one, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!*" and the accursed one is cast into *the abyss of hell*.

O unhappy tree, on whom the Lord found no good fruit, but only evil fruit! Such is thy dreadful fate, to be cast into hell-fire, for it is written: "*The tree which bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.*" How awful is the lot of the sinner when once the Judge has sentenced him to hell-fire! O ye souls of the damned, lift up your voices, and tell us what hell is, that we may yet preserve ourselves from it.

Listen, how they make answer and say: "Hell is the place where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth forever and ever. "We suffer torments in these flames;" and again they cry out: "*Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, neither hath it penetrated into the hearts of men to understand what torments God hath prepared in hell for those who hate Him, in hell where one torture is heaped upon another.* (St. Chrysostom.) Again: "*No man knoweth, no man knoweth how severely God punishes in hell.*" (St. Louis of Grenada.) "No human words can describe the agonies of punishment in hell." (St. Chrysostom.)

Jesus, our Divine Saviour, tells it us Himself in the terrible sentence which he pronounces upon the damned: "*Away from me, ye cursed ones, into everlasting fire.*" Look at the damned, they are *away* "from God," everlastingly separated from God, everlastingly separated from that unspeakable bliss, from that fulness of joy enjoyed by those to whom it is given to see God in

Heaven; everlastingly separated from that happiness and delight which God has prepared in Heaven for the blessed; separated everlastingly from Mary the Queen of Heaven; everlastingly separated from all the angels and saints who rejoice before the throne of God in untold joy; everlastingly separated from their fathers and mothers, from their sisters and brothers, from all their friends and acquaintances, who had the infinite happiness of entering into Heaven, whilst they were cast into hell. O terrible words: "*Away from me*"—away from God, away from the happiness of Heaven, away from all the saints and the blessed ones of Heaven!

"*Away from me, ye cursed ones!*" Accursed forever by God because they are His foes, for mortal sin dwells forever within their souls and there is no longer for them the possibility of repentance; cursed by all the blessed ones of heaven, because during their lifetime they have offended and blasphemed God, the highest good; cursed by all the demons of hell, the avengers and tormentors one of the other. Cursed by all those whom they have led into sin and who by sin have been brought into the same place of torment. O dreadful word: Accursed by God, accursed by all the blessed in Heaven, accursed even by the devils and by the damned!

"*Away from me, ye cursed ones, into everlasting fire.*" All-merciful God! Is it true which Thou hast spoken? Hast Thou indeed prepared for the sinner such an awful punishment *as eternal fire*? Yes. The Lord has Himself declared it unto us, and has made it known to us through His apostles that the sinner's punishment shalt consist in everlasting fire, that so we may be warned from hell. *Away from me, ye cursed, into eternal fire,*" is the

sentence of Jesus. Can these words prove false? "*I am tormented in these FLAMES!*" is the cry of one of the damned out of the depths of hell: can it be proven false? "*Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings.*" Thus saith the Holy Ghost by the Prophet Isaiah (ch. xxxiv.) Can these words be false? O terrible fate of the sinner, an eternity of hell-fire! O terrible fate in hell of the unbeliever, for "*He who believeth not, shall be condemned.*" O terrible fate in hell of the unchaste and the sensual, for "*their portion will be in a burning pit of fire and brimstone.*" O terrible fate in hell of the unjust, the rancorous, the envious, the passionate, the profligate, the murderer, for "*those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Gal. v. 19--21.)

"*Depart from me!*" Such is the sentence upon all. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into EVERLASTING FIRE! O sinner, consider—" *into everlasting fire!*" Not for the short moment, such as was sufficient for the sin, no, *forever!* Not for fifty, sixty, seventy years, according to the measure of the sinner's life; no, *forever!* Not for one century, not for thousands nor millions of years; no, *forever!* O eternity, eternity! how long art thou? And the damned answer, "*Forever!*" O eternity, eternity! how many years dost thou number? And the damned answer: "*Forever and forever!*" O eternity, O eternity! how long do thy torments endure? And the damned howl forth once more: "*Forever, and forever, and forever!*" O eternity! how fearful art thou! O vengeance of God upon the sinner, how awful art thou!

O Christian, as thou valuest the salvation of thy immortal soul, I beseech thee to bring forth good fruit, so that the Lord, when He cometh seeking fruit on the tree of thy life, may not say: "*Cut down the tree,*" and cast it into the everlasting fire!

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